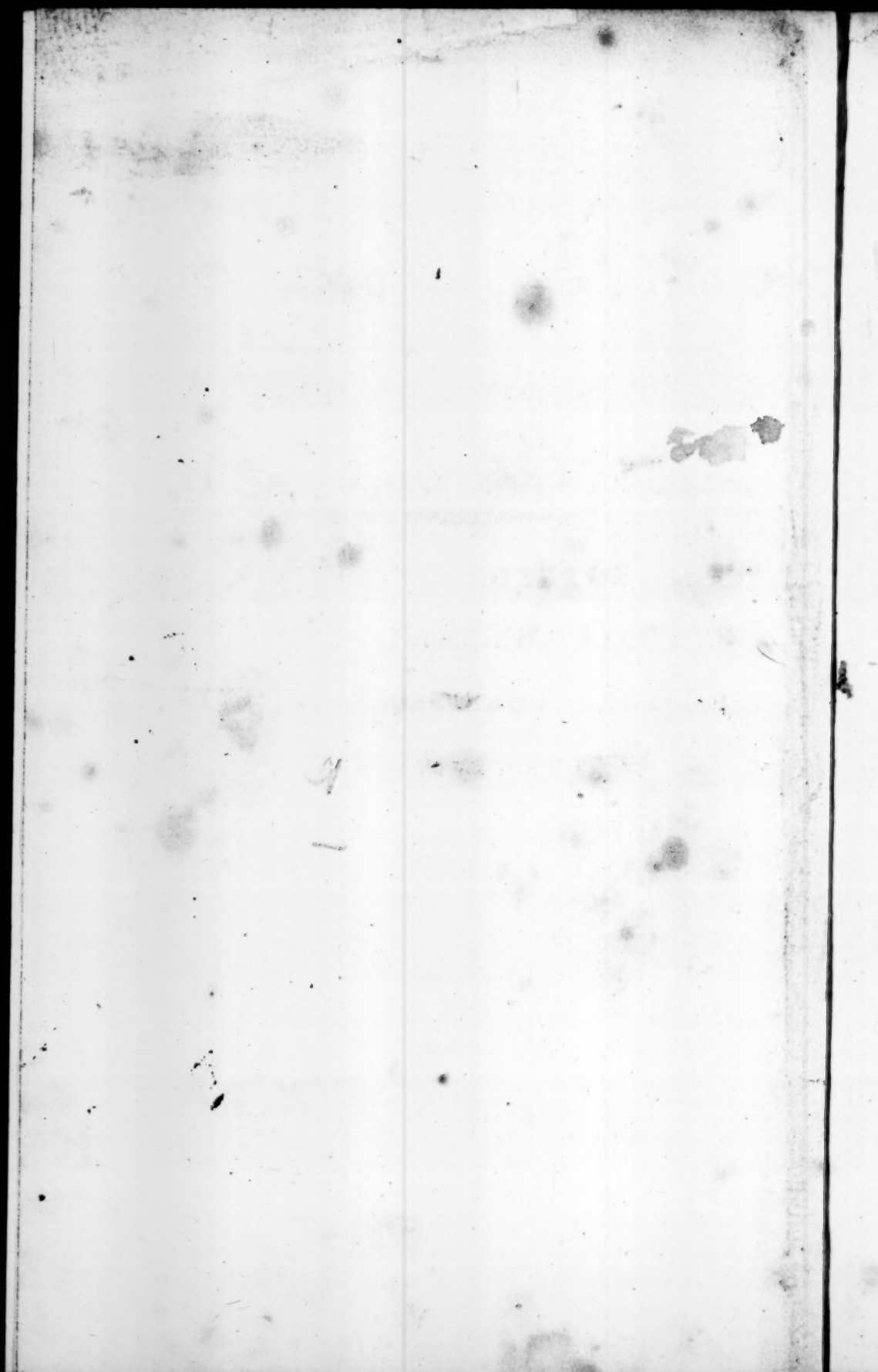


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MR. EMERSON'S DISCOURSE
BEFORE THE
ROXBURY CHARITABLE SOCIETY.



A
DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
ROXBURY CHARITABLE SOCIETY,
AT
THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

SEPTEMBER 15, 1800.

BY
WILLIAM EMERSON,
MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN
BOSTON.

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1800.



CHARITY.

ECCLES. xi. 1, 2.

Cast thy bread upon the waters ; for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight ; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

FOR *thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.* So numerous are the evils upon earth, that we are sometimes ready to justify the opinion of Solomon, when he preferred the state of the dead to that of the living, and esteemed all the works that are done under the sun, a scene of vanity and vexation of spirit. Marks of imperfection, and symptoms of disorder and trouble, are impressed on the face of our world. True, the earth was not created in vain ; God formed it to be inhabited. But it was made for man in the immature stages of his existence. It is fitted rather for his education, than his permanent abode ; and should be considered as the place of his trial, and not as his final home.

Accordingly, every thing within and around us proves the present life to be a mixed state. No
human

human prosperity is so firmly rooted, as to be able to withstand the storms of adversity. No worldly pleasures are so pure, as to be wholly free from pain or disgust. The very means of our existence and happiness are convertible into the instruments of our torture and destruction. The air we breathe is constantly necessary to the purposes of life ; yet this air is sometimes tainted with a poison, which drinks up our spirits. Our food is the indispensable minister of our support ; and still, how often is it the source of disease and death ! Throughout the habitable globe, the joys of health are closely followed by the sorrows of sickness, the splendour of riches by the cries of want, the triumphs of power by the groans of slavery, and the ardour of hope by the sighs of despondence.

These ills of humanity are the record of every age, the product of every clime, and the complaint of every tongue. Ancient history is a mere picture of the malignant effects of private and publick wars, of earthquakes, pestilence, and famine. And what is the business of modern historians, but to describe the operation of similar natural and moral disorders ? If we roam amid the wilds of savages, their sufferings excite our pity, and their cruelties, our horror. If we enter the social state, we observe its most polished members in vain labouring to kill the cares inseparable from refinement. With the acquisition of our wealth and knowledge, we become more vulnerable to the shafts of misfortune ;
and

and by the improvement of our taste and sensibilities, we multiply the causes of our grief. It is in civilized life, that the anger of the heavens, the sterility of the earth, and the treachery of the seas, are the most terrible in apprehension, and destructive in their consequences. The elements here rage with the same fury, as in the desert of barbarians. The sun parches indiscriminately the waste and the cultured field. The cottage and the palace are with equal avidity embraced by the flames. The winds wage the same war upon the ocean, when intrusted with the wealth of the Indies, as when no vessel floats on its bosom.

Our calamities, moreover, are frequently sudden and unexpected. They come in a day, when we look not for them, and at an hour, of which we are not aware. We are now prosperous on the hill of fortune, and now disconsolate in the dark vale of affliction. The most stable and the most valued of terrestrial comforts are, indeed, like grass, which in the morning groweth up and flourisheth, and in the evening is cut down and withered.

As it is impossible to foretel the advent, and elude the mischief, of the convulsions of nature, so are the havock and wretchedness, which wait upon ambition and vice, beyond the limits of our prescience and calculation. The work of a single hour has sometimes spoiled the glory of a brilliant empire, sent thousands to the shades of death, and entailed upon helpless innocence the deserts of wickedness.

edness. There are multitudes of people in this revolutionary and warring world, who once imagined grandeur their perpetual inheritance, now mourning their departed affluence in scenes of solitude.

There is, in sum, no citadel, in which man is secure against the miseries of life. They pursue alike the good and bad, the wise and foolish. Without a moments warning, they often bury the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, in an undistinguished grave.

Let us not, however, impiously attribute to chance the evils, which disquiet the earth. The confusion and distresses, which seem to us fortuitous, form, perhaps, a part of the plan, which infinite wisdom devised, and consummate goodness is effecting. Blind as we are, we can discern the fitness of Gods ordaining natural, and tolerating moral, evil in a world of discipline. And certainly it is the part of compassion, as well as of prudence, in the Deity, to hide from us the knowledge of those calamities, which we cannot escape. The father would be instantaneously miserable, if he foreknew the profligacy of a beloved son. The fond mother, already too anxious for her repose, would be utterly inconsolable, were she to behold within the veil of futurity her babes dying. Commerce would languish, if every merchant could predict his losses. And patriotism would rest from its labours, should we positively know, that our country was shortly to be ravaged by anarchy, and shortly afterwards, ruled by a despot.

Future

Future evils are then wisely and mercifully secreted from our view. We know, that they may possibly afflict us ; and this knowledge keeps us from presumption. We are flattered by our chance of avoiding them ; and this hope saves us from despair. Our ignorance inspires courage, and our experience, caution.

Thus the governour of the world, by surrounding us with foes, concerning the time and manner of whose operations we can get no intelligence, places a strong guard over the interests of virtue. He hence teaches us to walk humbly before him, and in the love and practice of mercy with our fellow-men ; to silence our own murmurs by partaking in the griefs of our neighbours ; and to prepare the balm of consolation for future sorrows, by comforting those, who are now in distress. He hence reads to frail man a lecture on his dependence and dangers, and says to him by a daily providence, as well as in the text,

Cast thy bread upon the waters. As in a world of perfect innocence, there could be no room for the display of divine mercy, so if the evils we mourn were banished the earth, our charity would have no exercise. Afflictions were designed, not only to try the patience of sufferers, but the benevolence of beholders. That energetick principle of sympathy, which lives in the breast, is an everlasting proof of our obligation to be charitable. If we cannot without pain see a brother in trouble, it is

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evident,

evident, he has a claim upon our beneficence : and this evidence is confirmed by the pleasure, which we feel from the relief we afford. Offices of compassion are, therefore, obligatory and pleasurable. They are obligatory, because the Lord is the maker of both the rich and the poor, and intended the earth for their common support ; and because the weak, as well as the strong, contribute something to the protection of society, and consequently are entitled to a share of its blessings. And the duties of charity are pleasurable, because it is more blessed to give, than to receive ; because they are voluntary ; because they spring from the best affections of the heart ; because they constitute the charming bond, which connects man with man, and man with his God.

It is the glorious and exclusive prerogative of the Deity to give to all, and receive from none. In giving bread to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, therefore, the benefactor of the poor is the most godlike of mortals. Especially does he merit this amiable character, if his charity flow from a principle of duty, and be communicated with a cheerful heart. This is genuine charity, and is neatly resembled to casting our bread upon the waters, since what is thus parted from us goes without reluctance, and solicits no recompense. This is the charity recommended by the scriptures, and approved by God. This is the charity, which blesses both the donor and the recipient. She is fairest

fairest and loveliest in the train of virtues. Her smiles are pleasant, as the light of the morning, beaming comfort on the children of wo. Her voice is softest musick, dispelling the cares of the unhappy. Her breath is more fragrant, than the gardens of Damascus : it is sweet as the incense, which angels offer before the throne of the most High.

Come, then, celestial charity, and take the guidance of our hearts. Go with us abroad into a world of evils, and shed thy solace upon miserable men. Led by thy gentle spirit, we will visit the dwelling of poverty, the infirmary, and the prison, and minister to their wretched tenants. The mourning widow shall receive our consolations, and the houseless orphan, our shelter and defence. We will assist the unfortunate stranger by our counsel, obscure merit by our patronage, and soothe by our tenderness the infirmities of age. We will inquire for those, who have seen happier days, and cheer them with the prospect of a happier world. We will do all in our power to lessen the number of ills upon earth, and swell the amount of human felicity.

Nevertheless, though we are compassionate, yet we are rational, beings, and should therefore be liberal with discretion. We must study the best methods of appropriating our charity. Possibly, this is the meaning of the preacher, when he advises to

Give a portion to seven. If it is the office of mercy to seek objects of distress, it is the part of prudence

dence to discriminate their claims. On all the indigent and afflicted, it is our duty to have compassion ; but as misery has its degrees, so charity must have its rules. The sorrows of the blind are more pitiable, than those of the lame, the wounds of the soldier, than the losses of the citizen, and the moans of seduction, than the tears of imprudence. One man wants money given him. Another will be equally benefitted by a loan. A third needs employment. A fourth is calumniated and oppressed, and asks the interposition of the just. A fifth is the prey of extortion, and demands counsel from the wise. A small temporary relief will meet all the exigencies of a sixth. But a seventh is totally penniless and decrepit, and must have a permanent maintenance.

The man, who would be just to these various claims, will find it necessary to institute method in the distribution of his bounty. After estimating his property and expenses, let him annually apply a portion of his income to charitable uses. A measure of this sort can plead in its favour the recommendations of excellent moralists, and the practice of the best men. By observing such a rule, the almsgiver will probably divide and appropriate the consecrated sum with wisdom. He will be led to assort the different conditions of the needy, and suit the number and kind of his benefactions to their respective cases. By this means he is doubly charitable. He gives them the fruits of his estate,
and

and of his ingenuity. He instructs them in the value and use of money, and thus in the means of acquiring independence. He is at once, indeed, the economist of the poor, and a friend of the commonwealth.

But every rich man has not the leisure, nor the ability, to class the numerous sufferers in a community, and to arrange their wants. In the business of succouring the helpless, as in most of the important concerns of life, two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not easily broken. As the interests of the weak and dependent find more compassion in civilized, than in savage life, so from institutions expressly benevolent, do they receive a more particular and successful attention, than they can possibly experience from the operation of general laws. Charitable associations are in their effects wonderful. It is their privilege to supply the defects of some individuals by the resources of others. They test the theories of genius by general discussion and actual experiment. They stimulate and ripen benevolent dispositions into deeds of goodness. And they marshal and direct the weakest efforts of pity to some valuable end.

It is, therefore, equally our duty and pleasure to pay honour to the Charitable Society, whose annual meeting is this day held. If donations "towards the relief of the truly unfortunate, indigent, and helpless of our fellow citizens," cannot fail of interesting the patriot in favour of this institution, it
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is as certain also of christian patronage, since it unequivocally recognizes the truth and motives of our holy religion. May it meet an encouragement liberal, as its design, and, like its parent, christianity, continue to disseminate its blessings, until the evils of our earth shall no longer be lamented !

As members, however, of a particular society, you will not entirely limit your beneficence by its particular regulations. Notwithstanding all the worth of publick charities, you will still value and use the liberty of doing alms in secret. You will reverence the precept, which bids you give a portion to seven,

And also to eight. The execution of charitable plans must not prevent you from indulging the feelings of compassion, when Providence unexpectedly throws in your way a child of wretchedness. There are griefs, which it were barbarous to expose, and there are wounds, which private sympathy alone can heal. Amidst the diverse calamities of our nature, there must necessarily be some, for which publick relief would be too dilatory, and which it can never effectually reach. Beneficent societies were not instituted for the sake of excusing us those incidental acts of charity, which every one has seasons of performing, and which make a part of every one's duty. They were formed for the purpose of insuring the happy issue of our own contributions ; of unlocking the coffers of avarice and unused wealth for the benefit of such, as have
not

not where to lay their heads ; of rousing sloth from his couch to attend on disease ; and of enlisting, as it is wise and righteous to enlist, every passion of the heart in the cause of suffering humanity. Whilst, therefore, you let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father in heaven, still let there be moments of dispensing mercy, when your left hand shall not know what your right hand doeth. Cultivate habits of private almsgiving, as well as of open generosity. These are indispensable ; those cannot safely be omitted.

Let it not be said, this is advocating a charity so diffusive, as will nourish idleness in the state. A profuse liberality is less to be dreaded, than detestable avarice. We are in greater danger of giving too little, than too much. Where one person suffers through the enjoyment of a misplaced bounty, there are seven sufferers for want of the stimulus of charity judiciously applied. But we ought rather to give a portion to seven or even *eight* unworthy paupers, than permit one virtuous beggar to perish at our door. If the poor have a right to the crumbs, which fall from our tables, they have a right to some of the food that remains on the board ; and the same reasons, which oblige us to be charitable, oblige us to be charitable in an eminent degree.

Yet the affluent man may not conceive, that a doctrine of this complexion is taught solely
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for the benefit of his necessitous neighbours. We ask him, it is granted, to make sacrifices for their advantage, but not to his own eventual loss. We wish him to bestow a portion of his wealth on the destitute, but not without, at the same time, giving him this sacred promise,

Thou shalt find it after many days. That the Deity is the spectator and rewarder of human actions is an ancient and comfortable truth. It is intimated by the light of nature, and established by that of revelation. It is illustrated, particularly, in the present and future happiness of the charitable man. As no character is equally rich in the promises of heaven, none partakes so freely of its blessings. Even in the life that now is, he has a good reward for his labours of love in the enjoyment of a tranquil conscience. The reflexions, that sting the soul of the oppressor, plant no terrors around his couch, and no daggers in his bosom. The work of his righteousness is peace, and the effect of his mercy a quietness unknown to strangers, and undisturbed by the world. He is likewise repaid for his beneficence by the benedictions of the thankful poor. When the ear hears him, then it blesses him, and when the eye sees him, it witnesses to his pity by tears of gratitude. Nor does he inherit the blessings of such as are ready to perish merely; most men have the virtue to reverence and reward the man of humanity. Are his circumstances reversed? Is he whelmed by those evils,
which

even prayers and alms memorialize in vain ? He is then the earliest object of the general succour, and thus finds the very bread, which he had formerly cast upon the waters of affliction. More : it provides sustenance for his seed, and an asylum for his children's children.

But these, christians, are not the only triumphs of your charity. The grave, though your appointed place of rest for *many days*, will not always be your prison. Your Master has burst its bars for himself, and he will open its portals for you. He then will give to you a life, which shall never end, and an inheritance, that cannot fade away. In this possession, you will receive an ample reward for that charity, which you this day bestow upon his poor disciples. In this heavenly country, you will find a respite from all your toils. The evils upon earth, which you sometimes severely feel, and are always dreading, will there utterly cease. Natural disorders will have no names, and pride, avarice, lust, and revenge, no existence. Temptation will have no object, and pains no employment. There will be no sun to smite you by day, nor pestilence nor darkness to terrify you by night. You will neither hunger nor thirst any more ; for your present corruptible bodies will then be incorruptible, and will be clothed with robes of purity, which the moth cannot annoy, nor time tarnish. Your capacities will be enlarged, and all your wishes gratified. Without darkness

and without obstructions, your intellectual faculties will be forever expanding and maturing beneath the influence of eternal wisdom. Your social pleasures will be infinitely multiplied and refined. Ages, as they roll away, will cement your union, and heighten the raptures of your intercourse, with the wise and good. On thrones of power, and crowned with garlands of glory, you will be seated in the presence of Him, in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Ah, ye MANY DAYS ! Why are your chariots so long in coming ? Give the swiftness of light to their wheels, and let us hear the title to this *portion*, in those accents of our sacred Judge, COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD !



CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES
OF THE
ROXBURY CHARITABLE SOCIETY.

ARTICLE I.

Of Officers.] THERE shall be a *President*, two *Vice-Presidents*, *Secretary*, *Treasurer*, and a *Standing Committee*, consisting of five members, to be elected at the annual meeting always, and to hold their offices for one year from the time of their election.

II.

Presiding Rules.] The President, and in his absence the First Vice-President, and in the absence of both, the Second Vice-President, shall preside. In the absence of the President, and two Vice-Presidents, the Secretary shall preside; in his absence, the Treasurer; and if none of these be present, the first named of the Standing Committee who shall be present, performing also the duty of Secretary.

III.

Duty of the Secretary.] The Secretary shall record the proceedings of the Society at their several meetings.

Of

IV.

Of the Treasurer.] The Treasurer shall receive all the monies of the Society, from whatever source arising, and shall keep a regular account of the same, and of the payments ; and also an exact list of the property, whether real or personal, belonging to the Society ; and shall exhibit to the Standing Committee those accounts at their meeting immediately preceding the annual meeting. He shall also give bond in such penalty as the Officers of the Society shall direct, for the security of such monies and other personal property. He shall also, from time to time, with advice of the Standing Committee, or a major part of them, put out on interest, or vest in some public funds, such monies as may be in his hands, more than sufficient to be kept, in the opinion of the Standing Committee, for the charitable purposes of the institution.

V.

Of the Standing Committee.] It shall be the duty of the Standing Committee to distribute to such persons as they may think proper (giving preference to members of the Society, and the families of members deceased) so much as they may deem necessary, of the income of the property of the Society, or of the unvested assessments, contributions, or unappropriated donations, as shall be from time to time devoted to such purpose by the standing rules or special votes of the Society ; and may draw

draw orders therefor on the Treasurer. The Standing Committee shall meet at some time in the week before each meeting of the Society, to consider of the business proper to be done at such meeting : And at their own meeting, immediately preceding the annual meeting, shall consider of the statements made by the Treasurer, and report thereon to the Society. They may have any other meetings which they may think necessary.

VI.

Meetings of the Society.] The meeting of the Society, which shall be considered as their annual meeting, shall be on the third Monday of September in each year, at such time of the day and place as the Society shall determine ; at which meeting, all the males of the Society shall attend, under penalty for each absence, at the time of calling the list, *twenty cents*. There shall also be another meeting of the Society on the third Monday of March, which shall be attended in like manner, under the same penalty for absence. At these meetings, any business, which the Society have a right to transact, may be transacted, save only, that no part of the funds shall be granted away, beyond what may be appropriated by the standing rules, without previous notice to the members, of an intention to move for such grant ; the time and manner of notice to be settled by the Society, or by the Officers of it.

Admission

VII.

Admission of Members.] Each member shall pay, at the time of his admission, the sum of *One Dollar*, and at each semi-annual meeting the sum of *Fifty Cents*; and each member neglecting to pay his semi-annual assessments, or his fines, for the space of twelve months, shall cease to be a member. Members may be admitted by the Society, or by their Standing Committee.

VIII.

Of the Discourse and Speaker, Contribution, &c.] That at the annual meeting in September, a Discourse adapted to the occasion, and proper religious exercises, shall be performed; on which occasion, all persons disposed may attend; and a contribution shall then be made for the benefit of the poor. And the person to deliver said Discourse to be chosen by the Society, at their meeting in March, annually. And if the Society neglect so to choose, or if the Speaker, so chosen, doth decline, or by any means cannot officiate, then a Speaker to be appointed and provided by the Standing Committee.

IX.

Of Donations.] All donations to the Society, if appropriated by the Donor, shall be applied, strictly, according to such appropriations.

X.

Of Revision and Amendments.] The foregoing articles may be revised, amended, or new ones added,
as

as the majority of the Society, at any of their annual meetings, may direct.

A true Copy.

NATHANIEL RUGGLES, Secretary.

The meetings of the Society, by their votes, are
—The third Monday in September, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, precisely ;—The third Monday in March, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, precisely.



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